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FOREST SERVICE MANAGES ISSUES

"We're all oriented toward catching the cannonballs," Don Girton, director of the Forest Service's Office of Information, told a group of USDA agency information directors and representatives March 19 in Washington, D.C. "We tend to be in a reactionary mode. We give very little analysis to problems."

So Forest Service information people are doing something about it. Girton described the eight-month-old issues management process at USDA's periodic meeting of its Public Affairs Council.

Issues management, Girton explained, is a process for dealing with problems that arise outside the organization's normal processes for identifying and dealing with them.

There are four basic steps, Girton explained: detection of the issues, analysis of them, development of positions on the issues, and then the articulation of those positions.

Public affairs specialists in several Forest Service regions have begun to implement such issues management, Girton said.

They keep an active log of regional issues (California has a dozen such active issues), preferably on word processors. Briefs are drawn up to describe each issue, and tables are set up to track their progress. Task forces are created to study each issue and then report recommendations.

The cooperation of program people and management is essential, of course. Girton has found his chief very pleased with the management system.

"He wants us to be out in front in identifying the issues," Girton said.

While regional offices may be able to identify and manage a dozen issues at a time, Girton said, the national office would select four to six issues of a national scope to manage.

Executive sign-off of issue positions is a key element of success, he noted.

"A lot of us came from a reporting background" noted Stan Prochaska, Chief of the Special Programs Division of USDA's Office of Information. "We need to get involved more in policy making and not simply reporting."

Girton will provide background information on the Forest Service's issues management to anyone who inquires. His DIALCOM mailbox is AGR061, his telephone number, (202) 447-3760.

MISSISSIPPI INVITES EDITORS, PUBLISHERS

Pleased with their 1983 and 1984 Media Days for the working press, Mississippi Cooperative Extension folks took communication a step further last September and opened their Mississippi State University campus to print media editors and publishers.

Barry W. Jones, Extension managing editor, news, reports: "We were extremely gratified with the results."

Their program was a classic in attention to detail. Responding to an open invitation in a recent "Inside Information" to explain their program, Jones offered three pages of useful facts. Here are some of them:

"Our two top administrators are relatively new and we had a desire to put both these men on a first-name basis with as many opinion leaders in the state as we could," Jones explains.

They invited only print media executives because in Mississippi the print and broadcast associations meet separately and, in some communities, are real competitors.

Importantly, written invitations were followed up with personal telephone calls from Extension or publisher friends and/or personal visits. Of the 17 editors and publishers invited, 13 attended.

The program started at 3 p.m. on a Thursday afternoon so some executives could drive over after lunch.

Program leaders in agriculture, 4-H, home economics and community development each used 10 minutes to "show and tell" with visuals. The rest of the 2 1/2 hours was filled with general discussion.

That night, the executives stayed at a nearby motel at their own expense. Extension set up a hospitality suite at the motel and "popped" for dinner at the campus wine laboratory.

The next morning, there were 2 1/2 hours of general discussion again. The seminar ended at 10:30 a.m.

The executives were given a thick packet of information to take home with them.

Results? There were the personal contacts, of course. But beyond that, some comments of the executives were revealing. Some, for instance were surprised to learn that 4-H is aimed at city youth as well as farm youth, and that Extension is involved in local government assistance and family money management.

Subsequent columns extolled the importance of agriculture to Mississippi, replete with statistics.

Jones says he expects Extension to host a similar event for broadcast executives later.

As for next year, Jones is uncertain. He's leaving in the fall to study for a Ph.D. in journalism at Ohio University.

INTO COMPUTERIZED GRAPHICS SHOPS?

Mark Wardle of the University of Idaho has hung out a "help wanted" sign for information about computerized graphics departments.

He's setting up such a department at his university and wonders if anyone has advice to offer on systems, hardware or software. If you have, contact Wardle on DIALCOM'S AGS706.

HATCH ACT CENTENNIAL EYED

The first State agricultural experiment station in the United States was organized in Connecticut in 1875.

The Hatch Act of 1887 provided for the establishment of similar stations in all the States and Territories in the Union.

Now plans are underway to celebrate the centennial of that far-reaching legislation.

Patricia Brazeel Lewis, public information officer in USDA's Cooperative State Research Service (CSRS) is centennial coordinator. Dr. James Halpin, Southern director-at-large, Clemson University, is subcommittee coordinator.

The basic theme of the observance is "A Century of Science for Agriculture and America."

Activities proposed or in the works include:

A special exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., a commemorative postage stamp, and Centennial film.

For more details, Lewis may be reached at DIALCOM AGS3003. Her telephone number is (202) 447-8752.

VIDEOTAPE HELPS ASCS GET OUT THE NEWS

Caught up in production details for another of his 4 1/2-to-5-minute "Agriculture Update" videotapes recently, J. Nelson Robinson had to be reminded that this was the 15th year of such programming by USDA's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service.

The show opened in 1970, when Robinson joined the Broadcast Services Branch of ASCS after 13 years of live telecasting of farm news in Oklahoma City.

Keeping up with new techniques of production and delivery is his greatest challenge, Robinson says.

Quality has to be as good or better than the broadcasters are doing themselves, or they're not going to use your material, he observed.

Robinson started delivery of "Agriculture Update" through satellite in 1982--the first in USDA to do so--and cut the mailing of tapes from 200 to 80, saving \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year.

"Agriculture Update" shares a 15-minute satellite time slot with the satellite news service of USDA's Office of Information every other Friday beginning at 3:30 p.m. (Farmers with dishes as well as broadcast stations can pick up these services at that time.)

Robinson said he often finds his material used on regular news broadcasts because he tries not to be too technical in his presentations. A typical format would include a face-to-face interview, some stock footage, slides, and other visuals.

Several broadcasters share footage from their own tapes with Robinson.

NEWS WITH THE SPEED OF LIGHT

The first thing that executives of the Oregon Wheat Growers League do each day when they arrive at their offices in Pendleton is pull USDA's "AGa.m." off DIALCOM. The news they get, they told "AGa.m." editor Clay Napier on a recent visit to Washington, D.C., often scoops what they're reading in Oregon newspapers.

ACE CONFERENCE AGENDAS SET

Details on the national conference and four regional conferences of Agricultural Communicators in Education (ACE) have been listed by Patricia Loudon, of Extension Service, president-elect of ACE.

The national conference, June 22-28 in Fairbanks, Alaska, will focus on interests that are unique to Alaska and the Pacific Rim. It will emphasize cross-cultural communications and teleconferencing.

Co-host of the meeting is Guam.

A post-conference tour will include a two-day stopover at Denali National Park (site of Mt. McKinley), a tour of the rich agricultural region and ag research facilities at Point MacKenzie, and a half-day tour of the Learn Alaska teleconference facilities in Anchorage.

Contact: Steve Leahy at DIALCOM AGS150 or telephone (907) 474-7214.

Here are highlights of the regional meetings:

Western Region: April 11-12, Imperial Hotel, Portland, Oregon, Program will highlight communications and student recruitment. Contact: Mark Claesgens, Washington, on DIALCOM AGS2455, or telephone (509) 335-2511.

Southern Region: April 17-19, Memphis Tennessee. Program will focus on communications and changes in the farm structure. U.S. Sen. David Pryor of Arkansas, will speak on national trends and pending legislation concerning agriculture. Contact: Bonnie Riechert, Tennessee, at telephone (615) 974-7141.

North Central Region: April 24-26, Lincoln, Nebraska. Program will feature communications and careers. Contact Terry Meisenback. Nebraska, on DIALCOM AGS1450 or telephone (402) 472-3007.

D.C. Region and Northeast Region: May 10-12, National 4-H Center, Washington, D.C. Program will focus on communications in the Eighties, including marketing, contracting, electronic technology and budget and staff reductions. Contact Denny Godfrey, West Virginia, for the Northeast Region, on AGS2500 or telephone (304) 293-4221. Contact for the D.C. Region: Russ Forte, of USDA, on telephone (202) 447-6633.

INFORMATION CIRCLE NEARLY CLOSES

When USDA issued its seven dietary guidelines in 1979, the Special Programs Division of USDA's Office of Information coordinated the production distribution, and general promotion of the carrier booklet, "Nutrition and Your Health: Dietary Guidelines for Americans."

Among the organizations that Special Programs worked with in developing distribution, program, and follow-up material was Metropolitan Life Foundation. Ultimately, the Foundation developed an attractive, comprehensive and effective packed called "Eat Well, Be Well."

In March of this year, USDA's Food and Nutrition Service sponsored a Nutrition Fair for its people. A leading contributor to the fair: (you guessed it) Metropolitan Life Foundation, with its "Eat Well, Be Well" videotape series, recipe booklets, and even door prizes. "While the circle was not fully completed back to Special Programs," commented Lillie Vincent, of Special Programs, "it was close enough to feel good."

INSIDE INFORMATION is published for distribution to public affairs and information staff members of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, its agencies, state departments of agriculture and land grant universities. Any items, comments and inquiries should be addressed to either John Crowley or Nancy Bevis, Office of Information, Room 536A, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250 or to AGRO09 mailbox on the Dialcom system, or call (202) 447-7454.

